



News Release

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Oil found inside hatch of old shipwreck at Ocean Shores

OLYMPIA – The U.S. Coast Guard has placed a sturdy patch on a hole in the shipwreck Catala at Damon Point State Park at Ocean Shores to prevent newly discovered oil inside the hulk from being disturbed.

The short-term fix will give state experts time to determine the best way to remove the oil from the partially buried shipwreck without disturbing nearby nesting birds and hundreds of thousands of migratory birds that pass the area this time of year.

“The situation is stable, but the oil is a threat to the environment and it needs to be removed,” said Jim Sachet, a spills-response manager with the Department of Ecology.

Sachet could not estimate how many gallons of old, black, weathered oil was in the deteriorating shipwreck until it was thoroughly assessed. That assessment is currently underway.

“We’re very concerned and don’t want to create a disturbance during nesting and migration season for shorebirds, so we are planning accordingly,” Sachet said. “We don’t want to create an oil spill by taking action before we know more about the tank.”

Although the old, sticky oil is not highly flammable, it has the potential to smother sea life. It is somewhat like asphalt at the surface and molasses inside the tank, Sachet said.

Sensitive species in the area include the snowy plover and the streaked horned lark, said Wildlife Biologist Derek Stinson of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Fortunately, the hulk lies in sand a distance above the normal high tide mark.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission plans to post signs asking for the public’s help to stay away from the shipwreck for public safety, and to stay away from the grasses and bushes where sensitive shorebirds are nesting.

A beachcomber first discovered the oil on Tuesday and reported it to Ecology.

The Catala grounded decades ago, and recent ocean erosion has caused it to come back into view.

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Broadcast version

The Coast Guard has patched a hole in the partially buried shipwreck, Catala, at Ocean Shores to prevent newly discovered oil inside the hulk from being disturbed.

Experts are assessing the situation and plan to remove the oil without disturbing nearby nesting birds and hundreds of thousands of migratory birds that pass the area this time of year.

The Department of Ecology says the situation is stable, but the oil is a threat to the environment and it needs to be removed.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission is posting signs asking for the public's help to stay away from the shipwreck and the bushes and grasses where sensitive shorebirds are nesting.